

# Finance Committee Minutes

Meeting Date: 9/19/2005

## CALL TO ORDER

The Meeting was called to order at 6 P.M. in the Town Room, Town Hall.

## COMMITTEE MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Brian Morton, (vice chair) Kay Moran, Irv Rhodes, Marilyn Blaustein, Alice Carlozzi (chair) 6:50

## STAFF IN ATTENDANCE

Barry Del Castillho Town Manager, John Musante Finance Director/Treasurer, David Burgess Assessor, Jere Hochman 7:00 Superintendent of Schools

## OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

Select Board members Hwei Ling Greeney, Ann Awad, Gerry Weiss, Robert Kusner  
7 PM School Committee members Elaine Brighty, Andy Churchill  
7 PM Library Trustees

## COMMITTEE Agenda

- Assessing 101 (Sit in on presentation to the Select Board)
- Discussion of the proposed Joint Financial Planning Group
- Discussion of Budget Process

## COMMITTEE ACTION

**None**

## Discussion

David Burgess gave a PowerPoint presentation on the property assessment process and tax rates followed by John Musante presenting a primer on Proposition 2 ½ definitions and processes. Paper copies of the presentation were handed out to those in attendance. [\(See attached Handout\)](#)

A question period followed the presentations during which people asked about specifics of the assessment methodology, and the exemption process. In particular, some people wanted to know what leeway the Town has in granting exemptions in addition to the ones we already have on the books. I.E. the residential property tax exemption that was discussed but not implemented for FY 06. A discussion of the differences in valuing residential vs. commercial property also took place.

At 7 PM, the assessment portion of the meeting concluded and people from the Schools and the Jones Library joined the Select board and Finance Committee for a joint meeting of the boards. John Musante handed out a draft of the local budget process, that process as it conceivably relates to the FY 07 process in terms of the calendar of events, a draft charge for the proposed JFPG, key budget issues as seen currently for FY 07, and excerpts from the Amherst Town Government Act related to the budget process.

([See Attached Handout](#))

The proposal to create a new committee (tentatively referred to as the Joint Financial Planning Group) was thoroughly discussed. Those present had differing opinions as to how far this new committee's charge should go but generally felt that it should be given a chance. Most felt that calendar issues could be clarified and exchange of information about projected resources and needs, etc., between boards and committees could be greatly improved by this group. Greeney stated that this committee could improve trust between the various groups. Concerns were aired about whether this group should really be setting spending priorities, how consensus was to be achieved and recorded, and whether each committee and board could find people willing and able to serve. In the end, it was decided to try it, and that each committee would name two of their members to serve, with a tentative first meeting sometime the first week of October 2005.

The Select Board and School Committee expressed a desire to investigate having presentations by departments given to the Select Board and the Finance Committee at the same time. (At prior meetings of the Finance Committee, it has been noted that in many instances, information the Select Board is interested in differs from what the Finance Committee is interested in, and, if two boards are hearing the material in one night, not everyone on both boards has an adequate opportunity to have questions answered. Also, at who's meeting does the presentation occur?)

The Select Board wishes to have a public forum on the budget prior to the development of the budget. From the discussion, it appears there is some difference of opinion as to whether it would entail public input to the process or if would be an informational only forum. The format has a great effect on the timing of the forum. A public input forum would need to take place earlier in the process to allow administrators and committees to include recommendations/requests into the proposed budgets ultimately presented for adoption. An educational forum could take place somewhat later in the process.

### Adjournment

adjourned at 8:35 P.M.

Respectfully submitted

Brian Morton

Acting Clerk

Approved 9/29/05